

SPECIAL SECTION – EDUCATION

Samuel Merritt nursing students get lesson in global health care – by Elizabeth Valente

ACCOMPANIED BY four Samuel Merritt College (SMC) faculty, more than a dozen Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) students will travel to Southeast Asia next month to provide free health care services to local Hmong villagers in northern Laos. This is the third year the college has conducted the medical mission trip overseas, organized by the program's associate professor, Valerie



Dr. Valerie Dzibur examines a patient in northern Laos.

Dzubur, EdD, FNP-C.

"As a nursing educator, my job is to make a contribution to the development of a new generation of nurse practitioners," said Dr. Dzibur.

Dr. Dzibur has been teaching the FNP program at Samuel Merritt College since 2001. She focuses on health screening, preventive care and advance health assessment. On Aug. 11, Dr. Dzibur will lead 25 people on a two-week excursion to local hospitals, orphanages and villages in and around Vientiane, the capitol of Laos.

The trip is part of Dr. Dzibur's new course, "Interpreting Healthcare in a Global World." The one-unit elective is an opportunity for her FNP students to travel to places like Laos and Thailand for developing cultural understandings in international healthcare. "I want the students to have an opportunity to experience what it means to be members of a global community, to develop cultural competence as a process of cultural humility," said Dr. Dzibur.

Along with providing free medical checkups, the program is also about supporting the local community. In recent

trips, Dr. Dzibur, through work with the Wind Horse Foundations, has helped build a preschool and sponsored a small orphanage. The foundation has also bought land in Thailand to create farming projects. This year the FNP group is helping a local public hospital. "We are buying a gurney, a simple metal one with padding," said Dr. Dzibur. "We visited this community hospital last year and when we asked what they needed, this was their request."

In conjunction with medical supplies for the clinical screenings, the group also brings bags of clothing, books and vitamin supplements for the villagers.

"One key reason for so many deaths and a worsening health situation in rural areas is the lack of medicine and supplies," said Dr. Dzibur, adding that many villagers cannot afford medicine for many common diseases, such as worms, or other simple treatable infections. One common problem the group will encounter in the villages is Vitamin A deficiency. "Night blindness is one of the first signs of vitamin A deficiency," said Dr. Dzibur. "Vitamin A deficiency also diminishes the ability to fight infections, decreases growth rate, and slows bone development. In countries where children are not immunized, infectious diseases like measles have relatively higher fatality rates."

According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) website, the health care access in Southeast Asia is so poor that in most villages people die from simple diseases that can be cured with ordinary pills. "Sometimes we provide medicine that we buy from local pharmacies, but the patient can't afford to buy themselves," said Dr. Dzibur. "A lot of people live on \$200 a year and some medicine can cost anywhere from \$3 to \$12."

At Samuel Merritt College, the FNP program has an emphasis on meeting the needs of multicultural and underserved populations. The funding for the FNP trip was raised and provided by SMC students, faculty and friends of the college.

Family nurse practitioners are licensed and fully qualified to diagnose minor

illness and injury, perform health assessments and can order necessary tests. In addition, they can prescribe many prescriptions and monitor chronic disease conditions.

For more information about Samuel

Merritt College and the FNP program, visit www.samuelmerritt.edu.

Elizabeth Valente is the associate director of publications and media relations at Samuel Merritt College.

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